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DEPT PASS TO KCC WILLIAMSBURG KY
DEPT FOR CA/FPP, WHA/CEN, INL/HSTC
POSTS FOR FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGERS, RSO, LEGATT, DHS, DEA

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FRAUD SUMMARY - BELMOPAN

REF: A) 09 BELMOPAN 000122, B) 08 STATE 074840

11. Per Reftel B, U.S. Embassy Belmopan provides the following information for the period March, 2009 - September, 2009:

a. COUNTRY CONDITIONS: Fraud encountered during visa and American Citizen Services interviews remains at moderately low levels. Post saw a slight increase in NIV fraud. Belize remains a destination of choice for Third Country Nationals (TCN) due to demand in Belize for certain professions because of historical emigration patterns, ongoing "economic citizenship" wherein residency and citizenship are expedited for business investors, and other avenues which exist for quick residency or naturalization based on family relationship. Proximity and ease of travel to the U.S. also make Belize a popular destination for petition-based non-immigrant visa applicants.

b. NIV FRAUD:

(1) Post adjudicating officers no longer routinely request to see applicant employment letters during NIV interviews. Officers are now encouraged to rely instead on applicant ability to describe the job in pertinent and convincing detail. Post NIV application instructions continue to recommend that applicants obtain and bring letters of employment in case additional confirmation and contact information is required during the interview. One application that was investigated by FPU during the last period uncovered an attempt by employees of a legitimate business in Belize to forge company letters sponsoring them for business travel to the United States. The adjudicating officer noted anomalies during the interview and a quick check with the employer confirmed the fraud. The employer notified FPU that the employees were subsequently terminated for their actions, but there was no criminal prosecution.

(2) Post reviewed its acceptance of legitimate business documentation submitted by self-employed NIV applicants and determined that in addition to business registrations, business owners should also be prepared to show recent business income tax and GST tax receipts. Legitimately appearing business documents in Belize remain easy to fabricate. In addition to verifying business ownership, government tax receipts provide adjudicating officers with corroborating documentation of income generated by a given business, as well as additional lines of questioning.

(3) Post has noted a slight increase in the use of fraudulent contact information in box 25 of form DS-156. The primary means of investigation is to look for Lexis and open source search correlations between the provided name/s, address and phone numbers/s. One applicant was especially convincing during the interview and had good prior travel, but random FPU investigation of the stated contact information discovered fabricated address and phone numbers. FPU has noted that the incidence of confirmed NIV fraud appears to increase consistently with the number of cases investigated. FPU has not yet noted any systemic patterns and each case thus far appears to be fraud committed on an individual basis.

(4) Post continues to receive inquiries from non-Belize resident TCN applicants or their legal representatives regarding NIV "renewals," most often "H1B" or "F1" visas, but in the past reporting period also including "E" and "R" visas. Post attempts to discourage non-Belize citizens or residents from applying in Belize.

Travel costs to/from Belize and accommodations are expensive, especially during tourist season, and there can be no guarantee of immediate visa issuance. As most air travel to non-local destinations is via the U.S., TCN visa applicants can find themselves stranded in Belize, where they have little or no resources, should visa issuance be delayed for any reason whatsoever. As all of post's NIV appointments are scheduled online, post will interview all applicants who physically present themselves.

(5) In the 12 months from September 2008 to September 2009, post received NIV applications from Nigeria (67), Honduras (60), the United Kingdom (47), Taiwan (46), Mexico (32), and India (27), among many other countries.

(6) Press and other reports of drug running, alien smuggling, and trafficking in persons have appeared less frequently over the reporting period. Post continues to benefit from the Belize Police Department's participation in NCIII and frequently identifies NIV applicants with IAFIS CLASS hits.

(7) Post has seen an increase in the appearance of American citizens at NIV adjudications. The Americans appear in support of the visa applicant and are usually the employer, friend or financial sponsor of the applicant. Post policy requires that the interview be conducted with only the applicant unless there is legitimate reason for the American to appear with the applicant. Legitimate reasons include family relationship, planned joint travel, ongoing economic sponsorship, i.a.

(8) Post last conducted a validation study in 2006 and is preparing to conduct another during CY 2009.

c. IV FRAUD:

(1) Post continues to encounter potential immigrant visa fraud, although FPU investigation is constrained by lack of investigative resources to follow up on any but the most egregious of suspect cases. One case currently under investigation involves a Chinese-born Belizean citizen who is the beneficiary of an IV petition by marriage. The beneficiary married the petitioner in the United States during a B2 visit.

(2) Belize civil documents are not electronically recorded and the paper records are often old, incomplete and damaged. The Belize government authorities themselves lack original copies of birth and marriage certificates, or report that original copies were damaged in fires or flooding. Because original civil records are often not available and Belizeans are able to obtain certified true "copies" of civil documents from Belizean authorities by presenting witnesses and affidavits, there is a high risk of genuine but fraudulently obtained civil documents. Belize however remains a small enough country where a few phone calls can usually substantiate a relationship claim. IV adjudicating officers routinely question IV applicant knowledge of petitioner's life, employment and biography.

(3) Post continues to see third country IV cases, wherein the petitioner or beneficiary has requested that the IV case be transferred to Belize because the beneficiary is now resident in Belize. Belize's proximity to the U.S. enables U.S.-based petitioners, particularly spouses, with ease of travel and access to beneficiaries during the visa petition and application process. Additionally, beneficiaries frequently take advantage of educational opportunities in Belize such as improvement of English language skills. Each request is reviewed carefully given the FPU's lack of investigative resources to follow up on third country ties.

d. DV FRAUD: No change. Post continues to receive and process very few diversity visa cases. Occasionally, Post receives inquiries regarding suspect DV Internet advertisements and Web sites. Post refers all individuals to official DV sites only.

e. ACS AND PASSPORT FRAUD: Post receives a small number of questionable adult and child U.S. citizenship claims and suspect passport renewals for long-expired child passports. In suspect cases, the applicant has the burden to provide the evidence of identify and citizenship.

f. ADOPTION FRAUD: Post is working in conjunction with the Belize Ministry of Human Development to clarify and strengthen standard procedures for the processing of adoptions under the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoptions. The Ministry of Human Development is the designated Central Authority in Belize under Hague Adoption guidelines.

g. USE OF DNA TESTING: No change.

(1) Post rarely recommends DNA testing and only in cases where paternity is unclear or questionable, and after documentary and other evidence has been carefully considered. Post continues to see a pattern of older U.S. citizen residents of Belize marrying Belizean spouses and presenting their children for citizenship registration.

(2) Belizean family patterns often tend towards men fathering children with several spouses, common-law or otherwise, over time. At the same time, women may have children by several different fathers over time. This is usually well-documented in birth records as it is customary, with the father's permission, for children to take their father's surname regardless of wedlock status. As common-law relationships are the norm, there is little-or-no stigma attached to such births.

h. ASYLUM AND DHS BENEFIT FRAUD: No change. Post routinely sees LPRs who report lost/stolen I-551 cards. Many older, Belizean and TCN (such as UK citizens) LPRs retire to Belize where they enjoy a lower cost-of-living and may already own property/residences. Due to increasing crime and the light construction of many residences, loss of passports and I-551s to burglary or theft is not uncommon. Nearly all such distressed LPRs have other personal identification and post is able to assist at once. In most cases, post confirms LPR status with the DHS/USCIS liaison in Guatemala City.

i. ALIEN SMUGGLING, TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND TERRORIST TRAVEL: No change. Belize is primarily a transit center rather than a significant source for illegal travel in terms of significant production of false foreign documents. However, large immigrant communities of Belizeans in California, New York, Florida, and Illinois provide a "soft landing" for both visa overstays and illegal entrants. Both English and Spanish are widely spoken in Belize, also aiding in the ability of Belizeans to assimilate and reside undetected in the U.S. Belize's ethnic mix, while primarily Creole (mixed African descent), Mestizo/Hispanic, Maya, and Garinagu (a Garifuna-speaking transnational group of mixed African and Arawak/Carib descent), also includes a growing East Asian component of first- and second-generation Chinese and Taiwanese (both Chinese and aboriginal ethnicity) immigrants, and a growing South Asian population primarily composed of Indian and Pakistani businessmen and their families. Also present and particularly well represented in the business communities is a population of long-assimilated Belizeans whose families are of Middle-Eastern and/or Lebanese origin, some of whom retain family and commercial ties to their earlier homelands. Post remains vigilant when adjudicating cases of naturalized citizens and TCN residents. Post continues to receive numerous TCN NIV applications. In the absence of a good prior record of U.S. travel, applicants are normally refused if they cannot show strong economic, social, financial, family ties to Belize. If Post questions or has reason to suspect the validity or authenticity of any document presented, the applicant will be refused. Post applies INA Sec. 214(b) ineligibility as appropriate.

j. DS CRIMINAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS: CA-DS cooperation at Post is close and cordial. Post anticipates the addition of an Assistant RSO investigator position and incumbent to help with the investigation of criminal cases.

k. HOST COUNTRY PASSPORT, IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, AND CIVIL REGISTRY: No change. Post reported previously on missing Belize passports,

suspected immigration fraud, fraudulent birth certificates, and document authenticity. All civil documents are suspect as Post sees repeated instances of questionable registration procedures. Fraudulent birth certificates, work permits, driver's licenses, and other documents are easily obtainable.

(1) Passports.

(a) As of March 16, 2009, Belize inaugurated issuance of a CARICOM passport in three types: Ordinary with blue cover; Official with green cover; and Diplomatic with red cover. The Belize CARICOM passports are machine readable and feature a data page as page 2 with digital photograph. The bearer's and authority signatures are also digitally photographed and printed on the data page.

(b) Previously-issued Belize passports feature a laminated data page as page 2, including a digital photograph, and are machine-readable. The bearer's and authorizing signatures are also digitally-photographed and printed on the data page.

(c) Older versions of the Belize passport feature a laminated data page on the inside of the rear cover, including hand-printed information, a glued-in photograph, and authorizing signature under the lamination. Both a raised embossed impression and ink stamp of the Belizean seal overlap the photograph. The bearer's signature is located on page 2.

(2) Birth Certificates.

(a) Currently-issued Belize birth certificates are on security paper with individual serial numbers, an original signature of the registrar, issued by the Vital Statistics Unit of the Registrar General Department, and are embossed with a raised seal of the General Registry of Belize.

(b) Older Belize birth certificates are typically certified copies of an entry in a district's register of births approximately sixteen (16) inches wide in a ledger format often seen in older registrations from the U.K. and other Commonwealth countries such as Jamaica, Ghana, and Nigeria. They include an original signature of the registrar general or his deputy and a "wet" ink seal as from a rubber stamp. Raised seal embossing on documents of this sort are the exception.

1. COOPERATION WITH HOST GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES: No change. Post maintains good rapport with Belize immigration authorities, police, courts, human/family services, and airline/airport personnel.

m. AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN: No change. The proximity of Belize to Mexico and the Caribbean creates a natural transshipment point for trafficking in illicit goods and people across the northern border with Mexico and, to a lesser extent, across the western border with Guatemala. With the success of the Corozal Free Trade Zone in northern Belize, there is increasing legitimate economic activity and travel across the northern border with Mexico.

Such activity may be outstripping the resources and capabilities of Belize customs and law enforcement personnel to police adequately. Post has received several tips in the past reporting period accusing frequent travelers with illicit activity. Post FPU has limited investigative resources and relies on DEA records and RSO local police contacts to investigate such claims. In many cases, FPU is unable to determine the validity of the allegation. Because the accused applicants can usually demonstrate strong ties and good prior travel, post typically issues the visa unless evidence of illicit activity can be supplied.

n. STAFFING AND TRAINING: Post FPU is staffed with one part-time Fraud FSN (5%) and one part-time Fraud Prevention Manager (10%). Post anticipates being able to dedicate more resources to Fraud Prevention with the addition of another consular officer to the staffing pattern in December 2009. Post will consider hiring an additional consular FSN who will be at least 75% dedicated to fraud prevention work, which will dramatically increase post FPU ability to follow up on suspect business activity and family relationships.

